

PLATO'S GODS

by Glenn R. Morrow

Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inner man, and may my outward person be at peace with the self within. May I consider him to be wealthy who is wise, and as for gold, let me have only so much as a temperate man can bear and carry. Anything more, Phaedrus? The prayer, I think, is enough. Let us go.

This prayer of Socrates at the end of the *Phaedrus* makes an intriguing close to one of Plato's most enigmatic dialogues. It is something of a shock to the modern reader to hear Socrates address such an earnest petition to the god Pan. This strange deity of Arcadia, half goat and half man, hardly qualifies in our eyes as a divinity at all. With his shaggy crooked legs and saucy tail, his cloven hooves and the amorous leer on his goatish face, he seems more comical than divine, especially when he is playing on his pipes and cavorting with the naiads and nymphs of the woods. If he is really a god, his appearance belies it; he is actually a striking illustration of that disharmony between the outer and the inner man which Socrates prays to be delivered from. And to the cultivated Athenian also Pan must have appeared as something of an oaf. Though his cult was popular among shepherds and farmers, it counted for little at Athens, maintaining only a precarious foothold in a grotto on the steep north slope of the Acropolis, well below the temples of the great gods Athena and Poseidon and the hero Erechtheus above. And who are the "other gods" associated with Pan in Socrates' petition? Certainly not the great gods of the Olympian family—not Zeus, nor Athena, nor Apollo—but local divinities of a minor sort, the water naiads and woodland nymphs with whom Pan loves to dally, and who have been mentioned incidentally in the opening pages of the dialogue.

From the artistic point of view this concluding episode is, of course, superbly appropriate. Socrates and Phaedrus have begun their séance with a discussion of the nature of Love. Socrates has shown that it is a form of madness, the kind of mental state that Pan was thought to produce on occasion; our own word "panic" carries the trace of this ancient bit of folklore. Socrates has gone on to show that Love is a divine madness, not an affliction, however, but one of the greatest of heaven's

blessings, for it is the passion that underlies the soul's desire for eternity and for the vision of truth. And this divine madness seems to take possession of Socrates as he continues; he is admittedly under an influence outside himself as he describes the soul's effort to follow its god up the steep ascent of heaven and obtain a glimpse of the superheavenly realm. This "inspired" myth, as Socrates himself describes it, is followed abruptly by a descent to the solid ground of rhetoric and dialectic, and Socrates engages in a long discussion of the technical requirements of artistic discourse and of the procedures of analysis and synthesis which are indispensable to the philosopher. This prosaic sequel is so prolonged that we are in danger of forgetting our starting point, and thus it is appropriate that after it is concluded we should be reminded again of the divine source of that madness which both afflicts and blesses the philosopher. And the setting of the dialogue fairly dictates the choice of the god whom Socrates should invoke for this purpose. The talk has taken place in the country, just outside the walls of Athens, on a warm summer day. Socrates and Phaedrus have been lying on the soft green grass, under the shade of a big plane tree, dangling their feet in the cool waters of the Ilissus, listening to the song of the cicadas, and feeling the soft summer breeze on their faces. In short, they have exposed themselves with abandon to the magic influences of nature at the season when we are most susceptible to them. Indeed it is the inspiration of this "holy place," as Socrates calls it, that moves him to give utterance to his splendid myth about the soul and her aspirations. What other god could Socrates invoke at the end than this god Pan, the personification of all these gracious influences of nature?

There is a second element of dramatic fitness in this closing episode, when we recall the Socrates whom Plato has portrayed in the *Apology* and the *Phaedo*. A man of scrupulous piety, he always has at his side an unseen companion, his daimonion, who has often restrained him, and has done so in this very dialogue, when he was about to do something impious. This is the Socrates who, as Plato portrays him, regarded his whole public career at Athens as a divinely appointed mission to his fellow citizens, a mission enjoined by the oracle at Delphi; the Socrates who took his dreams so seriously that he spent a part of his last days in prison composing an ode to Apollo, lest he inadvertently disobey a divine injunction that he should "make music," and whose last words were a reminder to Crito to sacrifice a cock to Asclepius. The Socrates here is thus fully in character when he appears as so sensitive to the requirements of piety that he does not overlook his obligations even to the minor deities of the Greek pantheon.

But this suggests a further and more difficult question. Is this episode appropriate to the character of Plato? We cannot doubt that Plato's was

a profoundly religious mind; but it was also creative, in religion as in other areas, and we know that he had a philosophical conception of God which went far beyond the ideas of his countrymen, a conception of one God, the source of all goodness and order in the world. This is in fact so close to the Judaeo-Christian conception that it gave powerful support to the Hellenistic Jews and to the early Christian thinkers in their efforts to construct a philosophical theology. For us, now that they have done their work, the great god Pan is dead. Could he really have been very much alive, we ask, in the mind of the man whose thought helped later generations to do away with him? Dead also are the high gods of Olympus, in all their splendor, with their trains of daemons and lesser divinities whom Plato has just described in Socrates' great myth. How could Plato—or Socrates, either, for that matter—have believed seriously in their existence and their effects on men and nature? Surely, we say, they must have seen through these make-believe divinities and recognized the folly of worshipping them. Indeed, does not Plato tell us as much in those passages where he criticizes Homer and Hesiod for their tales about the gods? If these passages are to be taken seriously, then this one in the *Phaedrus*, and the many others in the dialogues which seem to be expressions of honest piety, can only be concessions to the conventions of his countrymen.

Ordinarily it appears like a breach of propriety to inquire closely into a man's religious beliefs; they are too intimate and personal, and a man is entitled to his privacy. If he uses the language of piety which is current among his fellowmen, we are ready to accept it as a necessary means of communicating his sentiments to them, and we readily pardon him the slight insincerity involved if their language is not precisely his. But Plato was not an ordinary man. His figure is such a towering one, and his character has been so diversely appraised by his admirers and his detractors, that an inquiry into his private attitude toward these gods of his countrymen seems justified. For if there is insincerity here, how can we fail to suspect a lack of candor about the other matters on which he professes to instruct us? But if we wish to find out what Plato's sentiments really were, where shall we look for them?

The dialogue form in which Plato casts all his writings often serves as a mask to obscure the author behind the words and thoughts of his characters. But in some of the dialogues the mask is more transparent than in others; and of them all, the *Laws* seems to offer the best opportunity to determine Plato's own thoughts on this particular question. Socrates does not appear in the *Laws*, so that the "Socratic problem" does not plague us here. His place is taken by an Athenian Stranger whose interests and experiences are so similar to Plato's, as we know them from other ancient testimony, that we cannot avoid taking him as a thin

disguise for Plato himself. For one thing, this Athenian Stranger is represented as advising a Cretan friend, with the aid of a second companion, a Spartan, concerning the constitution and laws for a new city that is to be founded in Crete. This is the sort of undertaking that the members of the Academy under Plato's leadership were frequently engaged in, as we learn from other ancient sources, and Plato's aid in some such enterprise had been invoked on at least three well-attested occasions. Plato had acquired a certain prestige as head of these highbrow legislators in the Academy and a reputation for competence in such matters; and this is the position ascribed to the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws*. Furthermore, the dialogue mask itself is much less prominent and sometimes is taken off altogether. During long stretches of the work, including parts that are highly relevant to our present question, we have simply a straightforward exposition by the Athenian, his companions listening like students at a professor's lecture. Here, then, if anywhere, it seems that we can catch the words of the real Plato. The religious institutions that he prescribes for this imaginary city ought to furnish unambiguous evidence of his own attitude toward the religion of his time, particularly since the city to be established is a new foundation, without history or traditions, and offering carte blanche to the legislator.

If then Plato had thought that the old Greek religion was dead,¹ here was a chance for him to propose a new form of worship for his colonists at the beginning of their political life. Religions, of course, cannot be invented by philosophers, and Plato certainly knew this; but a disapproving philosopher would hardly have copied so slavishly as Plato does the religion of his people. For it is the familiar Greek religion that he proposes for this new state, with its pantheon of Zeus and the other twelve gods and their host of attendant deities, and with the familiar sacrifices, dances, games, and festivals connected with their time-honored worship. This system of observances is never presented together as a systematic whole, but what is more telling, is inserted item by item at relevant points of the legislation, sometimes merely by a bare reference which invites the reader to supply details that the author does not think it necessary to spell out in full. Each area of conduct, each chapter of the code of laws, is under the special patronage of a familiar god. Zeus, for example, is the protector of the oath (the Zeus Horkios of Greek liturgy), the protector of the stranger and suppliant (again familiar roles, those of Zeus Xenios and Zeus Hikesios); he is also the protector of boundaries (Zeus Horios), and with Hermes is the guardian of heralds and ambassadors. Athena is the patroness of the arts and crafts; she is especially offended, for instance, if the artisan does not receive his pay. Apollo is the patron of dance and song, and through them of the whole system of education. Hera supervises marriage and the rights of women;

the fines levied for breach of the marriage laws are deposited in her temple. Dionysus is the giver of wine, of Bacchic dances and ecstatic revelry, and the patron of Plato's quaint institution of the "chorus of elders" whose function it is to set the higher standard of singing and dancing. These elderly gentlemen will clearly need the stimulus of wine to carry out their duties properly. There is even a familiar but nameless deity, the goddess of the highways (*enodia daimon*), who looks after objects that travellers have left behind them. The gods of the underworld, dread Hades and his assistants, appear in Plato's legislation, for it is to them that funeral sacrifices and ceremonies are performed. Bloodshed in all its forms, accidental, passionate, or deliberate, must be purged in accordance with the time-honored procedures laid down by the oracle at Delphi. Even the Eleusinian mysteries, an important and honored part of Athenian worship, appear in Plato's state, though of course without their Athenian designation, for this is to be a Cretan colony. Not merely is the whole of Plato's legislation sprinkled with such pious details, but the traditional religion even underlies the political structure of the state. Each of the twelve tribes has one of the twelve gods as its special patron; each subdivision of the tribe is to be under the patronage of one or other of the gods, daemons, or heroes; and every household is to have its hearthside worship to its family gods. Elections of officers take place in sacred areas adjacent to the temples of the gods we have mentioned; jurors in the courts swear by Zeus and Hestia to render an honest verdict; and judges in the court for capital offences "pass through slain victims" (a phrase from religious law) as they deposit their votes on the altar of Hestia. And so on.

All these details are presented with such scrupulous adherence to the niceties of Greek ritual and observance that it is obvious the author knows his religious law thoroughly and respects it. In fact it is laid down as a guiding principle that the legislator must refrain from altering in the slightest degree the sacrifices and rites that are already established in the area of the new colony. Plato regards all these traditional practices as having the authority of the oracles, those holy places where God declares his will to men. Of these oracles three were especially sacred in classical times, those of Dodona, of Ammon, and of Delphi; all three had played an important part throughout the archaic and the classical periods in regulating religious worship, for example in establishing new cults and modifying old ones, in transferring the bones of heroes, in adjusting the boundaries of sacred areas and protecting them from encroachment. Plato mentions all these oracles, but in his time the oracle of Apollo enjoyed the most widespread authority and prestige. Apollo's sanctuary at Delphi had become, in a real sense, the religious center of the Greek world, an oracle whose advice was sought, when

possible, on every important occasion in the life of an individual or a city, and whose instructions could be flouted only with the greatest circumspection. So will it be in Plato's model city. "We must bring from Delphi laws about all matters of religion," says the Athenian Stranger (759c).

This massive body of evidence, of which I have only scratched the surface, shows how punctiliously Plato adopts the religious practices of his time in all their details. But this result is undeniably puzzling. It suggests that the philosophical legislator in Plato has completely abdicated his function in the area of religion, and we find it hard to believe that Plato really intends to do this, unless we can see a philosophical reason for it. And when we remember the passages referred to earlier in which Plato criticizes Homer and the other poets for the unedifying and immoral tales they tell about the gods, our puzzlement increases. How can Plato be reconciled with himself when he reinstates these gods for worship in his model city?

A variety of divergent explanations has been given for this seeming inconsistency. The *Laws* is a work of Plato's old age, certainly written after his sixtieth year; and it has often been suggested that it only shows that Plato, like many lesser men, became more susceptible, as he grew older, to the religious teachings he had learned in childhood. In his youth he had been a philosopher and critic; in his old age sentiment and tradition took over, obscuring the philosopher in him. This explanation, though plausible in general, will not do for our particular difficulty, for the decision to defer to Delphi in all matters of religion is not the decision of the aged Plato. The remark of the Athenian Stranger just quoted merely reaffirms a principle that Plato had laid down many years before in the *Republic*, in a passage that is often overlooked. After Socrates has completed his first sketch of the ideal state, Glaucon asks what part of the legislation still remains to be laid down.

"For us nothing," Socrates replies, "but for the Apollo of Delphi the chief, the fairest, and the first of enactments."

"And what are these?" asks Glaucon.

"Sacrifices, and the founding of temples, and other services of worship to gods, daemons, and heroes. . . . For we who are founding the city know nothing of such matters, nor if we are wise shall we use any other interpreter than our ancestral one. For this God who delivers his interpretation from his seat in the middle and at the very navel of the earth is surely the ancestral interpreter in religious matters for all mankind" (427bc).

No religious institutions are in fact prescribed in the *Republic*, and this passage tells us why. It is not because they are unimportant—on the contrary they are "the chief, the fairest, and the first of enactments"—but because they lie outside the competence of the secular legislator. Thus it is not a reversal of Plato's former position but rather a re-

affirmation of it when the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* says that we must go to Delphi for laws on all matters of religion.

Another common explanation is that Plato simply recognizes the futility of trying to eradicate these firmly rooted beliefs and practices of his countrymen; and since his purpose is to draw the outlines of a practicable program for the Greece of his day, he has no alternative but to acquiesce in them. The authority of a legislator is limited; and even the founder of a new colony, though its members are to be drawn from different parts of Greece, could not hope to do away with the religious traditions that all his colonists will have in common. Thus it is said that Plato admits, though reluctantly, these traditional beliefs and practices. The difficulty with this explanation is that if it were true, we should expect Plato to leave these unnecessary and uncongenial practices alone, trusting that in the course of time they would wither away of their own weakness. We should not expect to find him strengthening them by providing for a more meticulous enforcement of religious requirements, and formulating—as he does—a drastic law against impiety, a law which, so far as we know, had its historical parallel in few Greek cities, perhaps only at Athens. It looks rather as if Plato thought that the Greeks of his day were beginning to neglect their religion, and that to correct this degeneration in the religious life of his time the state must protect it—and not only protect it, but control it, so far as that is consistent with the authority of Delphi.

Finally there is a more cynical interpretation. It has been said that Plato, himself indifferent to the appeal of these old gods, is proceeding in the spirit of a thoroughly realistic, if not cynical, legislator who sees the utility of religious sanctions for insuring obedience to law, and adopts, as the handiest and most useful means for accomplishing his legislative purpose, the practices that have the strength of long Greek tradition behind them. Plato's own cousin Critias had been a realist of this sort. In a fragment of one of his poems we find him explaining the belief in gods as the invention of some ancient "wise and crafty statesman" seeking a means of deterring men from secret wrongdoing.² The memory of Critias was not held in honor by later Athenians, but this legal-utilitarian theory of the origin and function of religion may have been widely shared by his contemporaries, emancipated as they had been by the teaching of the Sophists. We find echoes of it in Euripides, and it was certainly not forgotten by fourth-century statesmen. Plato too was well aware of this law-supporting function of religion, and himself frequently invokes the sanctions of divine displeasure and punishment in a future life to deter transgressors. To be effective, such divine sanctions must be presented in vivid concrete terms; and what would be better adapted to this purpose than the familiar apparatus of Zeus with

his thunderbolts and the underworld gods with their pitchforks and scourges?

But upon reflection it becomes clear that the explanation offered does not cover all the facts; it explains only a part, and that the less important part, of the role of religion in Plato's state. The function of religion is analogous to the function of law which it supports. Plato declares that the purpose of law is not so much to punish transgressors as to educate all the citizens; likewise he regards the policing function of religion as subordinate to its positive role in molding the citizens' character. Before attempting further to solve the puzzle with which we have been dealing, let us see how Plato conceives of this positive function of religion, and then we may properly ask how he could have thought that the religion of his countrymen could discharge it.

The nature and function of religious worship are set forth in solemn words by the Athenian Stranger at the beginning of the prologue to his legislation in Book IV:

God who, as the ancient tradition tells us, holds the beginning, the end, and the middle of all that is, moves through the cycle of nature straight to his goal. In his train follows Dike, the punisher of those who fall short of the divine law; and she in turn is followed, in humility and orderliness, by every mortal who would be happy; while he who is lifted up with pride, whether of wealth or power or youthful beauty, and has a soul hot with insolence and thinks that he needs no guide or ruler but is able himself to be the guide of others, he, I say, is left deserted of God (716a).

The language of this solemn passage is clearly an echo of the great myth in the *Phaedrus*, which pictures Zeus at the head of the procession of the gods, all of them with their trains of worshippers, climbing the steep ascent of heaven, some of the followers managing to keep in their lord's train, others falling out and being left behind.

What line of conduct, then, the Athenian Stranger continues, is dear to God and a following of him? One only, that which is expressed in the ancient proverb that "like is dear to like" Therefore he who would be dear to God must, so far as is possible, be like him and such as he is. Consequently the temperate man among us is the friend of God, for he is like him; whereas the intemperate and the unjust are unlike and at variance with him (716cd).

The imitation of God is a theme that runs like a golden thread through Plato's later dialogues. Recall the eloquent passage of the *Theaetetus* in which Socrates declares that the ultimate bliss of the philosopher is to become like God, through withdrawal from the petty details of this world to the heights of contemplation (175b-177a). What we have just read from the *Laws* is the same doctrine, transposed from the philosophical to the religious key. Philosophy is the exercise of thought, the practice of dialectic; but religion is the practice of worship, and worship is

rooted in the feelings. The essence of worship is the sentiment of reverence, Plato believes, reverence for forms of being higher than ourselves; and the practice of worship is the performance of acts of devotion and dedication to these higher beings. Through worship a man recalls them to his mind and reenforces his sentiments of reverence; in worship he is actually assimilated, for a time at least, to the god whom he worships. To be effective, such worship must be habitual, reminding the citizen at frequent intervals of these higher forms of being, recalling those sentiments that are likely to be crowded out of mind by the cares of ordinary life, and confirming by repeated dedication the worshipper's commitment to his god. Religious worship, as thus conceived, is for Plato one of the most important factors in molding the character and training the sentiments by which a man becomes really just, temperate, and courageous. This is the specific way in which religion supports and supplements law, viz., by developing an emotional attachment, an enduring and quasi-instinctive love, for those virtues which good citizenship requires. This area of tradition and reverence is what Plato regards as the divine sanctions to the performance of our duties. There is another kind of sanction, that of prudential reason; reason shows us, if we reflect upon the various kinds of pleasure and pain and the kinds of life they accompany, that the choice of temperance, courage, and wisdom is the most conducive to happiness. The practice of worship, then, is in full accord with the judgment of practical reason; but religion has a more immediate and an immensely greater effectiveness because it acts directly upon the sentiments, and thus prepares a man for the ready acceptance of what reason pronounces to be best (732e-734e).

Religious worship, then, is not an exchange of services between men and gods, as might be supposed from an unthinking inspection of religious ritual, and as is in fact suggested by Euthyphro in his dialogue with Socrates. Rather it is this ritual, adorned with dance, song, and prayer, by which the nature of the gods is brought vividly before the worshipper for admiration and imitation. The favor that it procures is not an external reward for the correct performance of the rites, but the fellowship of the gods and their approbation of the worshipper's character. And the consequences of it will be the "divine goods," i.e., the virtues in which man's true happiness consists. Therefore, the Athenian Stranger concludes,

For a good man to engage continually in sacrifice and communion with the gods, by prayers and dedications and all kinds of worship, is an exceedingly good and glorious thing and most conducive to a happy life (716d).

But can the Greek gods furnish the patterns for imitation which this conception of worship requires? Surely not the gods as sometimes pic-

tured by the poets and mythmakers. Not the Zeus who mutilated his father Kronos; not the Apollo who seduced Creusa and concealed his escapade; not the Ares and Aphrodite engaged in secret amours, nor the Hera who quarrels with Zeus, nor the Zeus who tries to keep his infidelities from her. These lustful, bickering, jealous gods, susceptible to bribes and flattery, partial to their favorites among mortals and vengeful towards those who have aroused their displeasure—these are not the models of orderliness and virtue which we should want our citizens to admire and imitate. Socrates declares roundly in the *Republic* that such tales about the gods are not to be permitted in the state. The *Laws* shows that Plato was of the same mind in later life and gives us additional examples of improper tales. Hermes was not a thief, no matter what the poets say (941b); the story of Zeus's infatuation for Ganymede is a fiction of the Cretans to justify their own lawless passions (636c); and as for the legend that Hera made Dionysus mad and that his gift of wine and Bacchic dancing was an act of vengeance, this is an affront to both divinities (672b). All this shows that Plato, although he sets up the Greek gods as objects of worship, repudiates a large part of the mythology that had gathered about them.

Since the mythology is all that most of us know about these gods, it seems at first sight inconsistent to accept the gods and reject their mythology. But to suppose that there is inconsistency here is to misunderstand Greek religion. Mythology was not worship; the myths were a poetic embroidery on the cults, the product of that impetuous Greek fancy that could not refrain from giving to every numinous figure a concrete appearance, a local habitation, and a history. The very variety of these myths and their mutual incompatibility show that they did not constitute a systematic theology, or a set of beliefs which it was impious to question or deny. The poet was apparently free to reject or modify an earlier myth according to his own or his hearers' pleasure. No, the heart of Greek religion was not in mythology, but in worship, in the observance of the practices of the cult, as they had been established by long tradition and regulated by the oracle at Delphi.³ Such worship implied, of course, an acknowledgement of the deities to whom sacrifices, prayers, and dedications were offered, and an acknowledgement of their authority over the lives of men, each in its traditional area of conduct and prescription. But there is no evidence that Greek religious law required any but the most general beliefs about the nature and history of these divine sponsors of the moral law. Plato's own law against impiety is equally general in its requirements. What Plato's law demands is only belief that the gods exist, that they have a care for men, and that they cannot be turned aside from justice by special offerings and ceremonies. There will be poets in Plato's state (even in the *Republic*

this is implied [607a]) whose function it will be to embroider these bare elements of belief with poetry and song and myth, as Plato has embroidered his own philosophical doctrines, and they will presumably be free to add imaginative elements as they please, provided only that they present true pictures of these divine beings.

Bearing this in mind, let us take another look at the passage in the *Republic* in which Plato criticizes the poets. Through all the Christian ages it has been tempting to think that he is writing here like some Saint Augustine born before his time, advocating a purified monotheism in opposition to the degenerate polytheism of his people. But to read it so is to ignore the clear words of the text and to miss the important point that Socrates is making. He is not saying merely that the poets, in telling the tales mentioned, are false to the nature of the true God; it is in the name of the traditional gods themselves that he brands their accounts as lies. He is saying that Zeus, if truly represented, could not be pictured as deceiving mortals to their undoing (*Rep.* 383a) or as overcome by anger (378d) or lust (390b); he rejects these and other such tales, not because they are portrayals of make-believe gods, but because they are false tales of recognized gods, the gods of the Greek pantheon. It is true that Socrates in this same passage also speaks of God, in the singular, and asserts that these tales are false representations of His nature. This is one of the many passages in which Plato uses "God" and "gods" in the same context, with no indication of a distinction in meaning between the two terms. And so we sometimes ask, "Was Plato really a monotheist or a polytheist?" The answer seems to be that he was both, as even a modern Christian often is—for example, when he dedicates a cathedral to St. John the Divine, or builds a shrine to the Virgin, or prays to St. Anthony. In any case, what arouses Plato's indignation is that these tales are travesties of the gods of Greek worship, the gods whom the citizens in his state are to honor and reverence.

Furthermore, this passage does not say that such tales are all that one will find in Homer and the poets about the gods. Indeed, to find examples of what Plato would probably regard as true representations of the gods we need look no further than to Homer himself. Think, for example, of the last book of the *Iliad*, where the grief-stricken Priam, bearing offerings, goes to the tent of Achilles to ask for the body of Hector. Zeus himself in his pity has planned this solution to a problem too difficult for the human actors to resolve, and has himself inspired these two pitiful mortals to play the parts assigned them—Priam to risk his life and sacrifice his dignity by visiting the Greek camp and appearing as a suppliant before the slayer of his son, Achilles to forget his wrath and accept Priam's offering as an honorable price for the body of his hated enemy. As Priam and his herald, with the wagon bearing

the precious gifts, leave the city walls and descend into the plain, Zeus sees them and sends Hermes to give them safe guidance. Recall how Hermes, in human guise, meets them casually at nightfall as they reach the stockade surrounding the camp of the Achaeans; how he leads them safely in the darkness, the while consoling the old man with praise of the dead Hector and with assurances that the body is still fresh and undecayed; how he lingers about Achilles' tent during the conference between the two tragic actors and later during Priam's restful sleep in the porch when the ransom has been effected; and how he wakes him before dawn and hustles him away before the enemy warriors are up and about. This surely is an authentic picture of divine providence, of divine companionship and consolation.

Similar pictures of the gods are to be found elsewhere in Homer, and in all stages of Greek poetry. The sculptors' work paralleled that of the poets. The modern student can still see, for example in the surviving marbles of the temple of Zeus at Olympia, how the sculptors caught the lineaments of the divine in their images of stone. We can see the majesty of Apollo in the west pediment, quelling the brawl between the Lapiths and the Centaurs; and in the fragments of the twelve metopes that once formed a frieze over the temple doors we can see the tenderness, grace and power of Athena as she attends Heracles during the performance of the twelve celebrated labors. One of these metopes pictures Heracles carrying the burden of the earth while Atlas goes to collect the apples of the Hesperides for him; here Athena assists the straining Heracles by a light pressure from below with the palm of her left hand—an unforgettable portrayal of effortless power. Nor can anyone who has seen it easily forget the figure of the mourning Athena in the National Museum at Athens, as she leans on her spear and gazes sadly at a tablet containing names of Athenian warriors who have lost their lives in their city's defence. There can be no doubt that these images, whether in words or in stone, spoke to the Greek worshipper even more movingly than they do to us. The great statue of Zeus which Phidias created for the temple at Olympia has disappeared and we can no longer read with our own eyes the message it carried, but we can read what Dion Chrysostom said of it: "Whoever among mankind is wholly weary in soul, whoever has experienced many sorrows and misfortunes in life, he, I think, if he stood before this statue would forget all the calamities and griefs that come in the life of man" (*Orat. XII*, 209M, 400R).

These and other similar portrayals of the gods in Greek literature make it easier for us to understand that Plato could regard the religion of his people as providing genuine objects of reverence and therefore as capable of discharging the important function of religious worship in his state.

Just because there was no official or orthodox mythology, these images of the gods were still plastic, and could take on new splendor and become even more adequate representations of the divine, as the developing culture and moral insight of their worshippers demanded. Pindar and Aeschylus had found this religion a vehicle for the expression of their profoundest insights and aspirations, while modifying this vehicle to accord with these deeper insights. Plato's was a mind of similar mold. This being so, I cannot doubt that the language of piety found in the dialogues is Plato's native language, as natural an expression for his religious sentiments as the Attic Greek in which these sentiments are phrased.

But did Plato, as a philosopher, really believe in the existence of the Olympian gods? The question must be asked here at the end, though it is very difficult, indeed impossible to answer without clarifying the terms of our question in ways which Plato's writings suggest but which they do not explicitly authorize. An object of worship is one thing, an object of scientific or philosophical thought is something quite different. It is clear, I think, that Plato did not regard the Olympians as objects of scientific knowledge. The *Timaeus* is quite explicit on that point. The *Timaeus* is indeed profoundly theistic; it pictures the generation of the cosmos as the work of a cosmic Demiurge, an artificer-god who frames the world and all its parts to the best of his ability; this hypothesis Plato boldly proposes as the most plausible explanation of the beauty and order of the cosmos. But the traditional gods of the Greek cosmogonies he accepts only with a certain irony. "Those who have given us these accounts were, as they say, descendants of the gods, and surely they must have known who their ancestors were. We cannot doubt the word of the children of the gods" (40d). This delightfully illogical defence surely indicates scepticism, especially since these traditions are said to be without the support of any necessary or even probable reasoning. Even more telling is Socrates' forthright statement in the *Phaedrus*: "We have never seen nor adequately conceived God, but we imagine him as a kind of immortal creature possessing both a soul and a body combined in a unity which is to last forever" (246c). These gods with immortal bodies as well as immortal souls, these are obviously the traditional Olympian deities, the gods of the poets, the painters and the sculptors, and these are said to be products of imagination, not scientific thought. Finally there is a significant *ignoratio elenchi* in the theological argument in the tenth book of the *Laws*. The Athenian Stranger advances this argument as a means of persuading the sceptics that they are wrong in denying the existence of the gods established by law (885b); but what the argument establishes is not the existence of the Olympians, but the reality of the philosophers' god, the cosmic Nous, or the "best soul,"

which we must assume as the explanation of the structure and orderly motions of the cosmos.

Yet unless this argument in the *Laws* is completely irrelevant to its context and to the persuasion that it purports to effect, there must be some relation between this God established by philosophical argument and the divinities whose worship is prescribed in Plato's state. There is something lacking in Plato's argument which the reader is expected to supply. I suggest that the missing link is Plato's favorite metaphor of the paradigm and its copies. Just as the worshipper imitates his god, so these gods whom he worships are themselves imitations, or images, of the divine principle revealed to philosophical intelligence; they are sensuous personifications of that wise and providential influence that manifests itself in all the course of nature and human life, but whose essence can be grasped only by philosophical thought. As imitations of that high God, they participate in the authority enjoyed by their archetype, and are worthy of worship according to the fidelity with which they represent His nature to our imagination. But they are objects of worship, not forces in nature, least of all forces which we can bend to our purposes; and there is no form of wrongdoing mentioned in Plato's legislation which he regards as more reprehensible than the practice of magic, or the pretence of it (909ab, 933a-c). It is significant that he regards this as the gravest form of impiety. It is more than a denial of the gods' existence; it rests upon a complete distortion of what their existence means for a genuine worshipper. Thus Plato remains a philosopher, but at the same time recognizes and makes a place for the legitimate and necessary demands of religious worship.

We are told that Plato erected in the Academy a shrine to Apollo and the Muses. If he participated in public worship with his countrymen, of which we can have no doubt, it would be in prayers and sacrifices to the gods of his people. As a philosopher he could only regard these gods as pictorial representations of the divine being whose nature can be truly apprehended only by nonsensuous thought; but as a poet and mythmaker himself, one of the most accomplished mythmakers of all times, he could take genuine delight in contemplating these godlike members of the Greek pantheon and through them worship the God of whom they were imitations.

NOTES

1. Wilamowitz comes close to saying this. *Glaube der Hellenen* (Berlin, 1931-2), II, 244.
2. Cf. Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*^a (Berlin, 1922), II, 387.
3. See Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind* (Oxford, 1953), 25ff., 128.